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LOUISVILLE, Ky., April 29 /PRNewswire/ -- Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation released the following statement regarding lawsuits announced today by a group calling itself the Coalition for Tobacco Responsibility. The suits reportedly are filed on behalf of Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans against the major U.S. tobacco companies.

While we have not seen details of the suits, it should be pointed out that lawsuits brought by health care funds have been thrown out by federal courts in Florida and Pennsylvania. A federal court in New York that issued the only decision upholding such lawsuits has certified it for immediate appeal.

The courts in Florida and Pennsylvania said that the health care funds have already collected premiums to pay for the health care costs of their insured populations, including the smokers, and simply are not injured by the decision of some of their customers to smoke.

In the Pennsylvania insurance case, the judge highlighted the fact that insurers in the case "have not suffered any cognizable damages." In the Florida insurance case, the judge said, "The fact that the tobacco industry has recently become very unpopular... is insufficient ground for this court to overturn well established common law rules."

It is not surprising that courts seem to be rejecting claims by health care funds for compensation as there is already in place an established process for individuals to seek redress for their alleged injuries linked to smoking.

Concerning allegations that the health care funds could have reduced smoking related diseases had the tobacco companies disclosed what they knew, the Pennsylvania court held that claims based on such a theory were "entirely too speculative to be taken seriously."

We expect other courts to reach similar conclusions as those reached in Pennsylvania and Florida, and dismiss these cases in their entirety.

Headquartered in Louisville, Ky., Brown & Williamson is the nation's third largest manufacturer and marketer of tobacco products. The company's major brands include KOOL, GPC, CAPRI, LUCKY STRIKE, and MISTY.

SOURCE Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation

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